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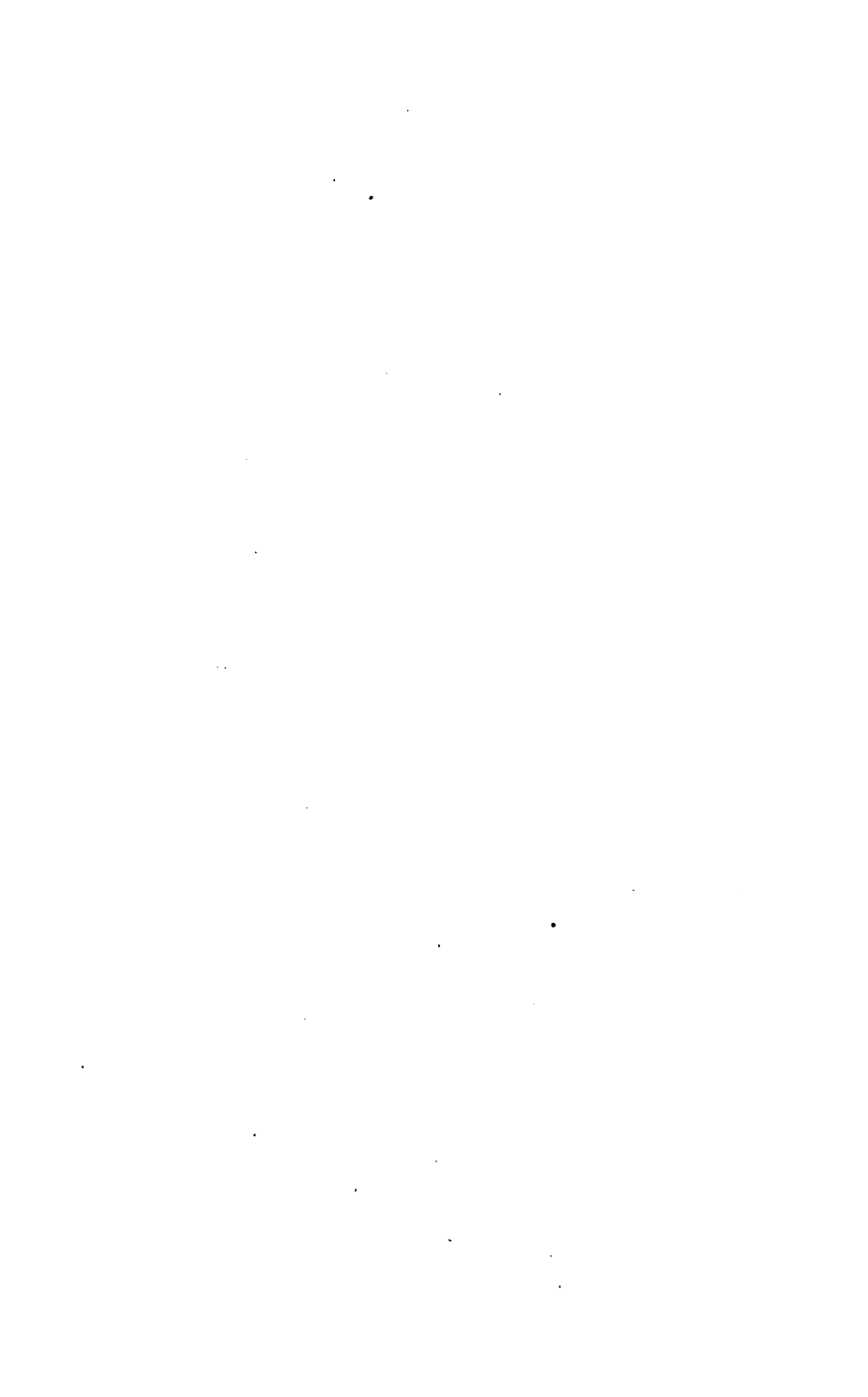
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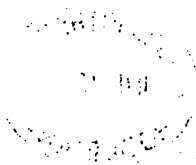
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# A SON OF MARS.

BY

ARTHUR GRIFFITHS.

AUTHOR OF "THE QUEEN'S SHILLING," "LOLA," "A WAYWARD  
WOMAN," &c.



2 Vols., 14/.

REMINGTON & CO., 133, New Bond Street, W.

# THE STORY OF HERITAGE.

BY

HERBERT GOUGH.

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ONE VOLUME.

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TO

A.B. AND HIS WIFE C.



# THE STORY OF HERITAGE.

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## CHAPTER I.

It is a dear, old-fashioned name, quite quaint and odd-sounding, yet nevertheless to me it has a peculiar sweetness and special charm.

Why I was called Heritage I do not know; I never remember being called anything else. Heritage was never abbreviated in any way, and no pet name ever took its place. Heritage I always was; Heritage I shall always remain.

I was the only child of Colonel Richard Dane, an officer of Her Majesty's army, who had seen some service, but had thrown up his commission when he inherited a large

fortune. This fortune he enjoyed for some years, till rash speculations and a fatal love for the gaming-table deprived him of nearly all he possessed, and reduced us to little better than poverty. I was only eighteen at the time, and had just come from school. I remember I thought the blow would kill him; I never thought he would rally, but with care and patience he recovered, to be but a wreck of his old self.

I never went from him until I was fifteen. He always used to say he could not spare me, for I was the only tie he had in the world. But as such tender care as he bestowed upon me was likely to interfere with success in my studies, with a great self-sacrifice he sent me away to school. For three years we were apart, save for the occa-

sional holidays I spent home. The separation was as bitter to me as to him; he was all I had in the world—my father. He alone formed my world.

I shall never forget the joy with which I came to the dear old home, never, I thought, to leave father any more; and I pictured days of infinite delight, of pure, unalloyed happiness; but the blow was waiting to descend, and ere many days, it fell with crushing force. The dear old home was sold—the dear old furniture parted with—but little was saved from the wreck.

Away from the old country side, which had been endeared to me from childhood, far away in a new home, many, many counties distant—where the name of Dane was unknown, where no one who had known us in

our prosperity could molest or trouble us in our adversity—we settled. Poor father at first felt his altered position much; but I tried hard to cheer him, and he gradually felt less the great changes in his fortune, so that when a year had passed by he had regained much of his former vigour and spirits; but still I could not fail to see the difference in the Richard Dane of to-day and the Richard Dane of twelve months ago. The figure now was bent, the memory clouded, the vision dim, the step uncertain, the flow of spirits gone. He clung to me like a timid girl clings to a strong man; he looked to me for everything.

I had sole charge of our little income, the remnant saved from the great wreck; and it was with difficulty, oftentimes, I managed to


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keep things straight. He used to call me his little housekeeper, and praise me again and again for the aptitude I showed for the position.

We saw no one; we kept exclusively to ourselves; and as we were such quiet, unoffending people, no one attempted to trouble us.

It was a pretty, picturesque village where Richard Dane and his child settled. Far removed from the great clamour of the world, near a babbling, quick-flowing river just escaped from the hills, and pouring in playful torrents on its way to the sea. The cottage we chose for our home was deep buried in foliage, and a little lane, winding through mazes of woodbine, foxglove, and sweet-scented flowers, led you to the wicket-gate of our little tenement. It was em-

bosomed in honeysuckle, monthly roses, and delicate westeria—no stonework of the house being visible. The garden revelled in rank luxuriance, and no hand ever tried to check the rapid growth or mould into form the wild, unruly size of the sweet, indigenous old plants. The white pink and sweet William struggled for mastery, whilst the ten-week stock and gorgeous sunflower reared themselves loftily above their shorter brethren with becoming dignity; and the homely London pride, in no way ashamed or abashed of its humbleness amongst grander and more aristocratic companions, intruded itself wherever it would. Great bushes of columbine appeared here and there, and sweet-smelling southernwood, determining not to be excluded, put in an appearance at dif-



ferent points. Then the stately snap-dragon kept guard over the little pink garden-daisy and tiny blue-bell, and the clinging sweet-pea trailed and pushed its way over all the fences and laid hold with tenacity on whatever came in its way. There, also, grew the white and the purple lilac and graceful laburnum—or, as I like to call it, golden chain—which in the fair season of spring, before the other flowers blossomed, made our little home so fresh and pretty looking.

It seemed very strange at first to come so many miles distant from a home replete with luxury and comfort that money could buy to this little cottage, where we found it difficult to make our little income. Soon grew to like the neighbour-

hood and love the little picturesque cottage home, and attach myself to the dear old garden. From amongst the flowers and under the thick foliage that surrounded us on all sides, we could hear the flowing of the stream over the moss-grown stones and granite boulders it encountered in its course from the hills. This sound made pleasant music to me as I used to sit alone in this dear old garden. I have often leaned on the wicket-gate in the calm, undisturbed quiet of a moonlight night in summer, and the placid flow of the stream, so distinctly heard, has made me feel so happy, contented and peaceful, that I have gone back to my dear father with bright hopes and pleasant thoughts, to cheer and make him feel as thoroughly happy as I.

The little winding lane led us directly into the main road to the village, which lay some small distance from our home. The river, which at this point was only a stream, ran under a little one-arch bridge, which formed the continuous road, and was overhung with large elms and graceful beeches, so that the light of day seemed almost shut out. As you stood on the bridge, on one side you saw the water come roaring down over massive stones, green with moss and lichen, and on the other side flow away more placidly over boulders, amongst ferns, and through a perfect avenue of stately trees. It was the sound from this point that always reached my ears in the cottage garden at home.

## CHAPTER II.

I soon became acquainted with some of the poor, and what little assistance I could manage to give I was always willing to. Only to the poorer inhabitants of this little village, which I will call Bentley, were we known. The better class ignored us quite, and those of our equals never knew we existed.

The former considered it *infra dig.* to be on visiting terms with people who resided in a cottage; and the latter, if they had known us, would probably have found us too out of the way to call upon, and of no advantage knowing, being unable to join in the round of their society. This was just what poor father

wanted—perfect quiet, where he need not be disturbed or called upon to mix with any friends at all. He felt so keenly the alteration in his position, that recalling the past seemed almost a torment to him. I never alluded to it; I always carefully avoided, but if by any chance I did happen to refer to it, I was ever quick to change the subject, and dwell on the beauties of our present surroundings.

So one year we passed like this, and I was almost accustomed—I may say quite—to the altered condition of our lives. I had long ago ceased to regret the old home—the large mansion standing in its noble acreage, the retinue of servants, the denial of nothing I wanted; and I was quite happy in the little cottage with one poor village girl for a ser-

vant, and sometimes scarcely knowing how to manage for a new dress.

And as I look back, these were some of the happiest and pleasantest days I ever spent.

At first I used to think of my school days, and the brilliant prospects I thought before me, and which I often used to discuss with the other girls. One alone, from the many, I chose as a friend, and with every promise to remain steadfast and true for ever, we parted to go our several ways. Only a few letters ever passed between us, for when misfortune came, my schoolmate's friendship died. She never wrote to me again. Thus young was I taught the insincerity, hollowness and falseness of the world, ever ready to smile on you in prosperity, and equally ready to frown upon you in adversity.

It is a pity to begin life having learned this true but bitter lesson ; it is apt to make one distrustful and doubtful of all things, and to the young this is particularly injurious. But I had not much time, fortunately, to think of this. I had only my father to care for, and his health and happiness was my only consideration. I can say positively that, as the summer came round and the flowers bloomed, and everything was bright and joyous, I was as happy as ever I was in my life.

The lord of the manor was a Mr. Esdale, who ever since we had settled in Bentley had been abroad with his mother. People said he had gone away to shake off the effects of a disappointment in love, but this was merely conjecture. From all we heard he was but a

middle-aged man, and father and I concluded he was too young yet to settle quietly amongst his tenants. Besides, we gathered from little scraps of gossip that continually float about a village, that the Lady Mildred was a very proud and haughty mother, and, though not completely ruling her son, yet holding a powerful sway over him. Moreover, it was pretty generally known she loved and doted on him to such an extent, that it amounted to little less than idolisation. Some rumours were current that her health required complete change, and that the doctors had ordered her abroad.

The Grange, the ancestral home of the Esdales, for some two years had been shut up, save for the people in charge; but now great preparations were being made to put

the house in order, for Lady Mildred Esdale and her son were coming home. Our house was on the Esdale property, and we felt an interest, though of course only slight, in the return of the squire.

The Grange was a massive, straggling old house of the Tudor period, with many additions of a later date. It was well backed with a forest of trees, and lay in splendid grounds, with well kept lawn and park. I one day had the curiosity to see the interior of the old place. Having made friends with the housekeeper, I had no difficulty in doing so. Worthy old soul! It was with such pride she showed me the spacious rooms, and with such an air of importance ever and anon told me some story connected with one or other of them, that I was obliged to appear

as though I had never seen or heard anything of the kind before. I felt a little sad after coming away ; all reminded me so much of the old days and the old home. I did not tell father I had been ; I don't think he would have liked me to go. He was so proud and sensitive that he could not bear anything but the strictest quiet. He rarely went beyond our garden, he seldom went into the village, and never ventured into the church. The rector—a kind, dear old man, of whom you may hear more further on—tried hard to make a friend of him when we first came, but father was so reserved and retiring that he at last gave it up, and finally ceased his visits entirely.

### CHAPTER III.

SOMETIMES, after service on Sundays, he would overtake me returning home, and walk with me as far as the bridge, but he never ventured up the little winding lane that seemed like a right of way to our house. He was very kind to me, and I think he was fond of me ; I am sure I was of him. He it was who told me that old Mr. Esdale had married the Lady Mildred Menton, eldest daughter of the Duke of Honroy, and that the present Mr. Esdale was their only child. He told me how fondly the mother loved him, and how ready he was to obey her in every little wish.

The family of Esdale was rich, that of


Menton poor ; and the alliance was in every way satisfactory to the heads of the house of Menton. The position of the former was indisputable. Though holding no title, they had won the highest distinction and renown in battle and in senate, and could, through a direct line, trace their ancestry as far back as the Mentons themselves. Though not for some years, this was not the first instance of an Esdale marrying the daughter of a noble. Their motto was "*Alte volo*," which, emblazoned on a scroll clutched by a huge stone eagle, surmounted either pillar that supported the large gates that formed the entrance to the splendid avenue of the Grange. The Esdales of Bentley, with their characteristic motto, were a family well known throughout the country.

From this point, the story which I am going to tell you—the story of Heritage—begins.

It was summer, as I have said, and we had been one year in the village. Glorious weather we had been having; glorious weather we were having still. Lady Mildred Esdale and her son had returned, and the village and the neighbourhood generally seemed quite gay. People said time had not altered either; the mother was, if anything, prouder and haughtier than ever, and the son as good-natured and as genial as before. I thought it mattered little to us how proud the Lady Mildred was, or how good-natured her son.

I was out a great deal; in the fields I strolled, and through the woods with Tartar.

I forgot to tell you of Tartar. He was my faithful old dog, a beautiful mastiff—a friend almost from childhood—a true friend ; ah ! never a truer. I could seldom tempt father out. Even the beautiful weather, the lovely fields, the pretty scenery, all in which I revelled, had no attractions for him. All day would he stay in our little sitting-room, the window thrown open wide to let the flowers that trailed round peep in, and to catch their sweet scents, deeply studying some book ; but oftentimes, I think, the book became neglected—aye, forgotten quite, and he would be lost in memories of the bitter, never to be recalled past. He liked me to enjoy myself, and never wished me to stay to amuse him, if I would rather be away in the lanes and fields.




I used to feel now and then just a little bit lonely, but I never let father know. I often wished for a companion of my own age, one to whom I could tell all my hopes and aspirations, all my doubts and fears. Though father was ever ready to listen to me, of course I could not expect that sympathy, that full appreciation of all my little whims and theories which I might have met with from one of my own age. So I used to think alone, and not give expression to my thoughts, save to Tartar, and he, poor fellow, could not understand me. I liked to get far away from the village, where no one would, in all probability, wander or stray; and then in the verdant fields, under the giant trees, surrounded by the loveliest wild flowers, with my faithful old dog as a companion, sit and

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## CHAPTER IV.

As I was wondering what I could throw to rouse the lazy dog, a voice almost in my ear said—

“ I am very sorry to trouble you, but will you let me get over the stile? ”

I could not have been more astonished if a bombshell had burst near me—it could not have more completely knocked me down, for I almost fell from my perch. The basket went flying from me, and I stood clutching the rail of the stile with tightening grasp.

Tartar, being disturbed by the little scream I gave, came running up to the intruder, at first with a loud bark, not savouring of friendship ; but on near approach he lost all

signs of hostilities, and sniffed around the stranger with tolerable complacency.

In my hurried dismount I saw the intruder was a man, and that was all. I had not the courage to look at him. I felt my face turn a deep crimson; the blood surged to my cheeks, so much so, that from the tears in my eyes everything for a moment or two looked blurred and dim. I tried to speak, but could not utter a word, and I felt my embarrassed position made me look most awkward and silly.

"I have frightened you; I am so sorry. I ought to be ashamed of myself speaking so abruptly, without giving you warning," the man who had frightened me said.

But the voice was so kind and gentle, so sweet and low, that it re-assured me, and I,

though still timid, looked up and murmured—

“Oh, please don’t mind me. I am very silly to be so frightened, only—only—”

I broke off suddenly, for the appearance of the man quite surprised me, as I, now fully overcome from the momentary shock, glanced deliberately at him.

In an instant I wondered if he had heard me singing, and if he had come up in time to overhear my few remarks to Tartar. As I thought of this, with lowered head and down-cast eyes, I felt my face getting hot again; but, trying to be brave, I looked up to see him staring steadily, and smiling—yes, actually smiling at my trepidation.

He was a man who had seen some five or six and thirty years; years that had not

gone well with him, judging by the stern and set expression of his features. Yet a kindly light beamed from the soft blue eyes, and a pleasant smile could play about the corners of the mouth. His face was bronzed, evidently from sojourn in some foreign land, and was entirely devoid of hair save for a long, flowing, fair moustache that almost hid his mouth; and fair curly hair, a shade or two lighter, clustered over his forehead and peeped out from beneath his hat. He was tall and broad, and seemed to me a very Apollo in appearance and a Hercules in strength. A suit of tweed with hat to match, formed his dress, whilst over his shoulder being slung a basket, and carrying in his hand a fishing-rod, I had no difficulty in guessing what sport he had been after.

He did not attempt to cross the stile, now I had made way for him, but stood looking at me in a half-amused manner. He did not speak, and I, not knowing what to say, made a step forward to take up the basket, when he, laying one hand on the stile, vaulted it as easily as possible, and pounced on the basket, handing it to me, as he said—

“I cannot forgive myself for the fright I have caused you. Can you?”

This relieved my embarrassment, and I felt I could speak without being shy or timid, as he looked at me so kindly and tenderly, with a sad, mournful gaze in his eyes.

“Oh, yes,” I said; “it was very foolish of me to be so startled, but—but—”

“It was all my fault,” he said. “I

ought to have made you aware of my approach."

"Why did you not?" asked I, for the first time thinking he ought to have done so.

"Because then I should have missed hearing 'Robin Adair,' and I could not afford to do that."

"Oh, you heard me sing, then; I am so sorry," I said, rather impetuously, colouring a deep crimson.

"That is unkind," he answered. "Why should you be sorry?"

"Because—because—" I began to stammer, but I could get no further.

"Because you have pleased me?" he asked, looking down at me from his great height.

"How can I have pleased you?" I ques-

tioned, forgetting that I was conversing with an entire stranger.

“By singing my favourite song in a way in which I have never heard it sung before,” he said, earnestly.

“You say this to please me,” I ventured to remark, looking furtively at him ; but I noticed he looked rather vexed, and he turned a little aside as he said—

“I should not say it unless I meant it ; in all my experience I never heard a voice so sweet, and fresh, and pure. May I ask where you have studied ?”

“I have really had no training ; I was only taught at school by the music master,” I replied, feeling rather uncomfortable at being thus cross-questioned, and almost compelled to answer in spite of myself, for there was some-

thing in this handsome stranger's manner that so attracted and interested me. Tartar had quietly laid on the grass again, and kept rigid watch over me to protect me from harm at a moment's notice if necessary.

"Did you hear the remarks I made to Tartar?" I asked, after a moment or two's awkward pause; "they were intended for his ears only."

"I did, then I thought it was time to make my presence known," he answered, though not smiling as I expected him to do, but wearing his usual sad and wistful look. Then after a few minutes he added, "Have you forgiven me yet? You have not said so, remember."

"Oh, yes, but you won't, please, ever allude to it, will you? at least I mean the re-

marks I made to my dog," I said, feeling the colour come to my cheeks with a great rush.

No sooner had I said the words than I discovered the mistake I had made. Here was I talking to an utter stranger, not known to me even by name, in a country wood far away from a village, asking him not to allude to a subject again, as though this incident constituted a right of acquaintanceship and placed us on a friendly footing. I wished I could have vanished ; I wished I could have run away. I did make a step forward, which roused the dog, but then I was held back by an irresistible longing to speak just another word to this stranger. I expected to see him laugh, or look angry ; but when I glanced at him he was neither, but looking at me as tenderly as a mother looks at her child.

He eagerly took up my words and said—

“ I promise you ; will that satisfy you ? ”

“ Thank you,” I said, and could say no more, for I am ashamed to say I began to cry. Why, I could not tell. Why, I cannot tell to this day. But I did. Oh ! I would have given all I had not to have done so then. I fancied I looked very foolish, and I dare say I did. I know it is distressing for a man to see a woman in tears, especially when he has a vague knowledge that he is the cause of them, yet cannot exactly fathom the reason.

## CHAPTER V.

THROUGH my tears I saw the troubled expression of the stranger melt away like snow before the sun, and I saw the sweet, pleasant smile, half of pity, half of tenderness, take its place. From the eyes the gentle look shone, and he gazed down at me with indescribable tenderness and pity.

“I have done this,” he said, quite sadly, “what can I do, tell me?”

“Don’t think me very foolish,” was all I could mutter, and I tried to dry my eyes.

“Have no fear of me, child,” he said, yet more tenderly, “I am old compared to you, quite old. I assure you I do not think you foolish as you fancy.”

As he said this I looked more closely at him, and I could see some silver hairs amongst his fair, curly locks. And I said to myself, this man must have seen some great trouble, some great sorrow that has blighted his life. And I pitied him from that moment, and felt a strange yearning to comfort him if I could. I had never seen any one so handsome in all my life I thought. Then my life had been so uneventful ; I had lived so quietly, and had seen so few people. I wondered who he could be. I wondered I had never seen him before. My tears were dried by this time, and I felt quite as bright and happy as before. I had lost all timidness and fear now, and could speak to him without minding.

“Tartar, we must go now,” I said, speaking to the dog, whereupon he immediately

came to my side; and then looking at the stranger I added, "I have a long distance before me; I am a long way from home."

I looked for him to say farewell, with just a little touch of sorrow, for he interested me so much, and I felt vexed to part without a chance of ever seeing him again. I was but young, and I may say this was the first man who had ever attracted me, who ever seemed different to me from others. I was surprised when he said—

"Are you going through this wood? Then you must be on the way to Bentley."

"Yes," I answered, "that is where I live."

"And where I live also," he said, smiling.

"Will you allow me to walk with you?"

"It is very kind of you," I said, hesitatingly, "I shall be very pleased."

This came very pleasantly to me, just as I thought he would part from me to go on his different way. Living at our village ; I wondered who he could be. I knew nearly every one there by sight, yet this face was entirely strange to me, for having seen it once, should I ever forget it ? Oh, I doubt it.

I now moved slowly on through the wood, along the little narrow path, by the side of the running brook ; he walking by my side, carrying the basket in addition to his rod, and Tartar bringing up the rear.

“ I promise I will not frighten you again,” he said after a while.

“ Oh, I know you will not,” I said.

“ Then I have no need to ask forgiveness, you grant it me.”

“Readily,” I replied, “oh, readily, if any be needed.”

I did not think I was doing wrong in accepting the escort of the man I had met by such a simple incident ; it did not strike me I was not, strictly speaking, standing upon etiquette. But then under the circumstances such would have been terribly misplaced. We were both going the same way, through the wood and field far away from the village ; we had had no introduction ; we neither knew the other ; he was a gentleman, and treated me as a lady ; I had nothing to fear. In this what could the world find to carp at ? What was there so very glaring against the conventionalities of society ?

We passed through the wood, under the thick foliage, left the babbling brook, and

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entered the fields and meadows that were now before us on the way to the village. We did not say much to each other. I tried once or twice to speak, but could not shape what I wanted to say into words. Every time I looked at my companion I found his eyes fixed steadily upon me, nor did he remove them when he encountered mine. At last he said, as he assisted me over a very awkward stile—

“I have not had the politeness to tell you my name ; pray forgive me, I quite forgot it. I am Ralph Esdale,” and he raised his hat to me as though I had been the grandest lady of the land in a fashionable haunt, instead of Heritage Dane strolling through a country field.

I was greatly surprised when I heard his

name, for I had pictured Mr. Esdale so differently from this. It was so strange to see him for the first time like this, to talk with him in the way I had been. I immediately thought of his mother, the haughty Lady Mildred, and wondered if she could be anything like her son. I wondered if he would ever speak to me again ; if his proud mother would be ashamed to let him be seen speaking to me or father. Then I smiled to think that this man should have any one to control his actions ; but I only thought this from hearing the gossip of the place. I suddenly recollected that the Danes were doubtless as good as the Esdales, and in the days gone by would have taken rank with them. But it was different now. No one knew us here, and father, when he came to Bentley, to

Be entirely free from any connection with the past, had dropped the Colonel, and was only known as plain Mr. Dane. Then Ralph sounded so pretty, and as he spoke his name I thought I had never heard such a sweet one. Mr. Esdale was all I had ever heard him called, and it seemed odd that he I had pictured so old, and cross, and disagreeable, should be so comparatively young and handsome, and bear such a pretty name as Ralph. I repeated it to myself as he said it, and he must have heard me, for he asked—

“You have heard it before?” Then continued, “I have not been home very long, I have been away more than two years.”

“Are you not glad to be back?” I enquired.

“Yes—very—*now*,” and he laid a great stress on the last word.

“Have you been in Bentley long?” he asked. “You were not here two years ago surely. I do not remember your face.”

“I don’t think you have ever seen me before to-day,” I answered. “Only the last year have we lived here.”

“Will you think me very inquisitive if I ask in which part of the village you live?”

“Oh, no; we live at the Glen Cottage, the little house by the stream—father and I.”

“Only your father and you?” he repeated, almost mechanically, looking far away, without intending it for a question, though it took the form of one.

“That is all. He has no one else in the world but me, and I, no one but him,” I said.

“Willington told me in one of his letters

the cottage had been let, but I had forgotten it," Mr. Esdale remarked to himself rather than to me.

Willington was his steward.

"Will you not tell me your name?" he asked, standing before a gate with his hand on the spring ready to open it.

"Dane," I said, hurriedly, as I passed through the gate.

I felt ashamed of Heritage then. I never had before; I never have since. I do not know what made me unless that Ralph sounded so pretty, and my name so odd and old-fashioned by its side.

Mr. Esdale closed the gate and came to my side again.

"You are afraid of me, child," he said, smiling at me. "Don't be, for I hope to see

much of you. I shall make your father's acquaintance shortly."

I thought of poor father, who wished for quiet and had enjoyed it for some time past, now suddenly invaded by a stranger who would no doubt wish to take him away from his solitude; and the thought quite frightened me. Then Mr. Esdale's calling would inevitably bring others of the neighbourhood to him, who hitherto had not deemed it proper to be on visiting terms with the occupants of the Glen Cottage; and I was sorry for father.

"You are very kind, but father lives so very quietly," I managed to say, though, doubtless, almost incoherently. "He sees so few people. He has made no acquaintance since he has been in Bentley."

“Will he refuse to see me?” Mr. Esdale asked.

“Oh, not refuse,” I said. “He will be pleased to see you,” I added, rather confusedly, making altogether a most contradictory statement.

“Then I shall call and see him, and my mother will call upon you.”

## CHAPTER VI.

THIS quite took away my breath. The Lady Mildred Esdale, the proudest lady in the country, coming to visit me, Heritage Dane, perhaps the most insignificant! This really frightened me, and for a moment I wished I had not met Mr. Esdale. I was almost ready to cry to think that our little peaceful, quiet home should be so ruthlessly invaded, and its tranquillity perhaps for ever disturbed. I felt so sorry for father, for I knew how he wanted to live quite away from the world; and I could not help blaming myself for being the cause of making him unhappy, for he would be unhappy I knew when he found his quiet home upset. I imagined

myself in Lady Mildred's presence, but the thought was too dreadful to dwell upon.

"But our home is so small," I said, almost piteously. "Lady Mildred will not like coming to it."

"My mother will be pleased to make your acquaintance," he said.

I could say nothing more; only picture to myself the splendid carriage, with the gorgeous-liveried servants, stopping before our little garden, and Lady Mildred descending. Though our house was small I knew I had nothing to be ashamed of, for was I not a Dane? And the Danes in their county were well known.

We were getting near the village now; only a few fields lay between us and the road. We, without exchanging many words, reached

the last stile, and were in the highway. The way to the Grange branched off to the right; mine went to the left.

"I go this way," I said, thinking, of course, he would go towards his home.

"I will walk with you to the Glen, if you will let me. Will you?" he asked, as he patted Tartar, who came up close to his side as we were standing.

"It is very kind of you," I stammered, and we moved slowly on.

"You have not told me your other name," he said, after a little pause. "I told you mine."

"You will laugh," I said, feeling I was getting very red again.

"Why should I?"

"It is such a strange, old-fashioned name."

“What is it?”

“Heritage,” I said.

“A pretty name. Quite suited to you, I think.”

“You like it, then?” I asked, eagerly.

“Most certainly,” he said, a smile stealing over his face at my so anxiously asking the question.

“I am so glad,” I said. “I thought you would laugh.”

“Laugh at you! You do not know me.”

He looked at me so tenderly that I was afraid to meet his glance, and I scarcely spoke again till we reached the Glen, just by the stream. Here I stood to bid him good-bye. He took my hand, raised his hat, and said again he would shortly come to see father.

“Good-bye,” I said. “Thank you for coming so far with me.”

“Thank *you*,” he said, “for letting me come with you. You will sing me ‘Robin Adair’ again, will you not?” he added, smiling.

“If you wish it, and will not laugh at me.”

“Have I not told you I *could* not laugh at you? Are you afraid of me still?”

“I don’t think so,” I said.

“Then cannot you trust me?” he asked, looking reproachfully at me.

I said good-bye again as I walked away, followed by Tartar, and branched off into the little lane that led to our cottage.

I told father of my adventure, and he at first smiled over it, but grew more serious when I told him of Mr. Esdale’s intended

visit. Of course, he did not blame me ; on the score of our being his tenants, Mr. Esdale had a perfect right to call. But father wanted to live quite undisturbed ; he did not wish for any company, mine being all he wanted.

## CHAPTER VII.

So the days passed away; one followed another, but I did not seem quite the same as a week ago. I did not feel so thoroughly happy, so thoroughly contented with my lot. Once or twice I found myself actually complaining, but I tried so hard, oh! so hard, to check the murmuring spirit. I would not have let father know what I thought for anything; it would have made him very sad, and he wanted nothing to sadden him in his old years. I thought all day long of Mr. Esdale; I could not get him from my memory. He appeared to me, the short time I saw him, to be all that a man should be—chivalrous, brave, and noble. I, in all my life before,

had never seen any one who had so struck me. I tried to thrust him from my thoughts, I tried to forget I had ever seen him ; but in vain—in vain. As I used to sit in the garden amongst the sweet old flowers, within hearing of the pleasant rush of the stream down the Glen, I would picture that stern, sad face with the sweet, wistful eyes, playful smile, and long fair moustache. I longed to hear if the stories afloat about him were true with regard to his long residence abroad. I longed to know if there was any truth in the rumour that he had been disappointed in love. Oh, how I longed to know what made him look so sad ; what sorrow had caused that sweet expression, for of sorrow only I felt it could be born. I wondered who could have loved and yet

deceived him. Cruel woman, who could ever have treated him so ! As I thought of this the tears would come to my eyes, and it was with difficulty I sometimes restrained them. I could not bear to think that he should have been made so unhappy. He spoke so kindly to me, with such a depth of tenderness and pity in his voice as no one had ever spoken to me before—save father.

Ralph Esdale ! It was the prettiest name there ever was, I thought ; I never tired of repeating it to myself.

As the days wore on, and one week had passed by, I felt a little sorrowful he had not kept his word and been to see father. I thought, perhaps, he did not like to disturb him after what I had said. Perhaps it appeared as though we did not wish him to

come. I was sorry now I had ever said we wished to live quietly; yet at the time I dreaded his coming, for fear of vexing father. Now, how I wished he would come! How I wished I could see him once more!—speak with him as I had that day! I remembered his words, and treasured them in my heart, “You must not be afraid of me, for I hope to see much of you.” And yet I wondered he did not come.

He came at last, one day when I was out. When I reached home, father told me of his visit. He was very pleased with Mr. Esdale, and though he so decidedly set his face against visitors, he seemed quite cheered and brightened by the argument he had been having.

A few days afterwards, the Lady Mildred

came in her gorgeous equipage, with her highly-trained servants. My heart gave a little throb, and my spirits fell considerably as I saw her descend from the carriage. I was in the garden at the time, so stepped forward to meet her, and led her into the house.

She was not quite what I expected to see.

She was younger, much younger looking, than I thought to see the mother of Mr. Esdale. They had not exaggerated in the smallest degree when they said she was proud. A haughtier lady I never saw; her every movement marked the *grande dame*, and her every accent seemed to freeze you with its chilling condescension. She was a woman you might respect—in time, like—but never love. There was an air of conscious

superiority about her—a *noli-me-tangere* kind of politeness that made you stand afar and keep your distance.

As she was leaving, the Lady Mildred condescendingly gave me her hand, and remarked—

“I am pleased to make your acquaintance. My son wished me very much to call. Some day you must come and see me at the Grange.”

I did not like to be patronised in this way, and was inclined to resent it, but felt how unwise it would be under all the circumstances.

## CHAPTER VIII.

It was soon known throughout the village and neighbourhood that the Lady Mildred Esdale had visited the Glen Cottage, and the quiet Danes, who before were never talked of, became considered nice people and worth knowing.

We had to submit to much inconvenience from the intrusion of visitors, and the perfect peace and quiet of our little cottage seemed likely to be irrevocably disturbed ; but I am glad to say that we were not much annoyed, for in the end the visits ceased, when it was seen how little they were appreciated by the retiring, reserved old man, and his equally unknowable, peculiar daughter.

I saw Mr. Esdale two or three times after this visit of his mother to us. I met him whilst I was out in the lanes and fields with Tartar. He always came to the gate with me, and once came in to see father. It is no good denying I looked forward to seeing him now. I tried to think what difference it made whether I saw him or not, but it was of no use. I did care to see him. Try as I would, I could not conceal the truth longer—I loved Ralph Esdale.

How strange is fate! I was a thoughtless girl, with no care, singing a quaint old song in a little wood far away from the busy world. Suddenly a stranger appears; we speak but a few words; I am terribly embarrassed. We walk together to the village and when we part I am conscious of a deep

interest in the man ; and when I have seen him a few times more, I know I love him. And he is a man, too, many years older than myself.

In due time I returned the visit of the Lady Mildred. My heart sank as I walked up the broad terrace, and I was really frightened as the pompous servant showed me in.

The Lady Mildred received me with proper pride, and a due appreciation of her position. I was very glad when I was released from her presence, and made my escape.

Soon after I passed the lodge I met Mr. Esdale.

"I would not come in and see you," he said, "as I wanted to walk home with you."

"You are very kind," I murmured.

“Not kind at all. I knew my mother would not let me go from her if I entered the drawing-room, so I came and waited for you here.”

“I don’t mind going home alone,” I said.  
“Please don’t let me take you so far.”

“Don’t you wish me to come?” he asked, looking at me searchingly.

“Oh, yes,” I replied, eagerly; “but I don’t like taking you so far.”

“If it is a pleasure to me, surely you cannot deny me?”

We now turned aside from the road and entered the fields, which was by far the prettiest way to the Glen. I cannot say how proud and happy I felt walking by the side of this man. Ah! Ralph Esdale seemed to me an embodiment of all that is noble, good and brave. How my heart fluttered as I

spoke to him ! How his words seemed to thrill me ! He could not know I cared for him. It was impossible for him to guess it. What good if he did know it ? He could not care for me. He, perhaps, would only laugh at my folly. What right had I, obscure Heritage Dane, to love Ralph Esdale of the Grange, he, who, by right of birth and prerogative of position, would marry a high-born lady—a lady of rank and title ? The family motto, “*Alte volo*,” could never be diverged from, and the pride of the Lady Mildred, if possible, would scarcely allow her son to wed with aught but nobility, for she was one who rigidly adhered to *noblesse oblige*, and would have shuddered at the thought of a *mésalliance*.

As we passed through the pleasant fields,

and under the great trees, with the scent of the new-mown hay about us, I could not help wondering what the Lady Mildred would say could she know her son of late had so often seen me. She, of course, looked upon the occupants of the Glen Cottage as her inferiors ; but, perhaps, had she known them as they once were, she would have thought very differently.

I never let father see there was anything different with me ; I think he would have been very vexed had he known I loved Ralph Esdale. So the secret I kept rigidly locked up in my own breast, almost fearing sometimes to look at it myself.

Mr. Esdale would not leave me until we reached the cottage, but he refused to come in and see father.

I stayed at the gate and watched him go down the lane till I could see him no longer, and then I went into the house with a sigh, and what seemed very like a tear strolling down my cheek. How I wished I was a grand lady ! How I wished I bore a title ! Never before did I so regret the loss of wealth ; never before did I so keenly feel our altered position. I had become quite accustomed to it, and now what I had taken so much pains and care to accomplish was all undone.

I went in and cried—cried to think that I should ever have met Ralph Esdale ; cried that he could never be more than a friend to me, whilst I loved him with my whole heart. Oh, I thought it would break as I fully realised this. I felt sure something had happened to

him, though perhaps long ago, to make him as he was now. I was confident some sorrow had fallen upon him which he had striven hard to overcome. How I longed to comfort him, to tell him how I sympathised with him !

So time went on ; the glorious weather stayed, and the weeks sped away. I saw Mr. Esdale often ; sometimes he came to the house ; sometimes I met him in my walks. Father was always pleased to see him now ; he got quite to like him. The Lady Mildred, too, I saw once or twice ; but she showed no signs of unbending, and preserved the same rigid manner.

## CHAPTER IX.

Now, the Esdales had been home some time, and had fully settled, and had taken up again their position in the county. So there was, during this lovely summer, a constant round of pleasure and amusement for them. Picnics, lawn parties, balls and other gaieties we were constantly hearing of. The Grange became a place of great note for all kinds of *réunions*. We, being outside the great world, only heard of these festivities, and even if we had been invited, it would have been impossible to go ; for how could we, with our little means, visit at the Grange ? Mr. Esdale sometimes spoke of them to me, but it was always as though he were bored at the very mention. But I always noticed

he never alluded to them, unless I broached the subject.

Of course it was only natural that every one was anxious to be invited to the Grange, for the master was unmarried, and, everything taken into consideration, was a most eligible *parti*. So, naturally enough, the names of several ladies whom he was accustomed to meet became coupled with that of Ralph Esdale. At first no one seemed certain where preference was given, and so for some time two or three were continually mentioned as likely to become the mistress of the Grange. But at last one lady was named for certain, and henceforth only her name was mentioned with Mr. Esdale's. And it was the Lady Adela Garston who was so favoured.

From what I heard, she was very beautiful, and carried with her the *hauteur* and pride that were characteristic of the Lady Mildred Esdale; and that it was on this account she was selected by the mother as a fit and proper mate for the son she so loved. At first the news was very sad to me. Of course I knew I had no right to love Ralph Esdale. I could never expect him to love me; yet I was terribly jealous of Lady Adela Garston.

I did not see so much of Mr. Esdale now, for the Grange was full of guests, and amongst them this lady he was to marry. I used to cry till I was weary and faint—till I wished that I could die. Oh, how I longed to see him! How I longed to hear his voice speak a gentle, tender word to me, in that

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sweet way of his ! How I hated Lady Adela ! Then Adela—what a charming name, I thought. How he must like it ; and how well it must sound on his lips. Whilst Heritage, oh, was there ever such an ugly name ? But as I repeated it, I did not dislike it, for had he not told me he liked it ?

Father seemed getting very much weaker, and this troubled me too—in fact, so weak he did not notice any change in me. My only friend now, to whom I could go for advice was Mr. Raymont, the rector of Bentley. His wife, too, was very kind to me ; but, being somewhat of an invalid I did not see her often. The first time I saw Lady Adela was in this wise :—

It was one Sunday evening in church. I singled her out from the rest of the guests

in the Grange pew, from the description I had heard of her in the village. She was dark, and certainly very beautiful ; like a queen of night—a woman born to command, and of which any man ought to be proud. And I thought Ralph Esdale looked proud and happy as he sat by her side.

As I tried to shrink from gaze in the corner of the old pew at the bottom of the church where I sat, the tears would stream in spite of all my efforts to restrain them. I tried not to feel bitter towards Lady Adela, but I could not help it. I thought during the service, I would get father to leave Bentley and go to some other village ; for, oh, it was bitter to stay and meet Ralph Esdale, yet know he could never be anything to me. I was thankful when the service was

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over, and the people left the church. I was one of the first to leave, but when I reached the porch the rain was falling heavily. I had no umbrella, and, as the cottage was some distance from the church, I, perforce, had to stay with many others until the storm should be over. The Esdales' carriage was waiting at the door, and I dreaded their having to pass me on their way to it. Thinking of this, I determined to get back to the pew, but, as I turned to do so, I saw them all coming down the aisle; therefore it was better for me to stay in the porch, where, amongst the others, I might escape unnoticed. They passed me, but Lady Mildred spied me, and, with praiseworthy condescension, held out two fingers for me to take. Lady Adela Garston noticing this, said, as she

looked at me, quite loud enough for me to hear—

“That’s a pretty-looking girl; one of your *protégées*, I suppose? You take an interest in these village girls.”

I was aware I was simply dressed, not in the glimmer of silk and satin, as was the Lady Adela, but the remark pained me—aye, more, the colour rose to my cheeks, and the tears flowed anew. Oh, how I would have given all I had to have stopped them; but no, I could not. I heard a voice I knew too well, say—

“Lady Adela, you mistake; this is Miss Dane,” and I looked up to see Ralph Esdale standing by me with an expression I had never seen him wear before. It was one of pain, as though he were struggling to deaden

some wound. But his remark was lost on Lady Adela, for she had gained the carriage. He held out his hand to me, and in his tenderest manner said—

“You will get so wet if you venture yet. There seems no chance of the storm being over. Do not leave for a few minutes, the carriage shall come back for you.”

“Oh no, no, thank you,” I said, through my tears, “I would rather not,” and the tears flowed yet more copiously.

“Promise me you will not leave till it comes back. It shall not be long.”

There was that in his voice I could not resist, and I assented.

“I promise,” I said; and he looked at me with pity, as he gave me his hand, and left me.

## CHAPTER X.

THE carriage drove away, and I felt almost sorry I had given the promise to wait. In about twenty minutes the carriage returned, the rain not having abated, and took me to the cottage. How kind this was of Mr. Esdale! I could not help thinking of it. And father was so pleased in knowing I had reached home safely.

I had time now to think over all that had taken place the last few hours. Ralph Esdale, to me, was nobler than ever he was before. I pitied him that he had chosen Lady Adela Garston to be his wife, he deserved some one more worthy of him. How proud she ought to be of him! And on the Sabbath eve, in

the stilly twilight, as I sat at the lattice window, the scent of the flowers coming in strongly after the recent storm, my thoughts were not peaceful as they should be, not in harmony with the sacred day.

By-and-bye the moon peeped out, and the stars shone in the clear heavens, and from the window I could see the rain-drops glistening in the soft light. Father was sleeping quietly in his large chair, the book fallen from his hand. The night looked so beautifully fair after the heavy storm of an hour or two ago, and the heat was so oppressive, that I was tempted into the air. I quietly left the room not to disturb father, and went forth into the garden.

The scent of the many flowers was abroad on the air, and seemed crushed out of them

by the heavy storm. The moon gave such a bright light that I could see everything distinctly. I went amongst the dear old flowers; I looked at them in the pale light; then I strolled to the little wicket gate. I leaned on it. The tall trees overshadowed me. I fell into a train of thought. The stream seemed to be swollen by the storm, for the sound of its rushing was greater than usual. I pictured it dashing over the large boulders, throwing out a small spray, and foaming as it rushed madly on. I thought in a few hours it would be calm again; and I fancied myself like this little river—my feelings had been tempestuous, and were increased by the *rencontre* with the Lady Adela Garston; but I hoped they would grow calmer in a short while, even as the torrent of the river would be

lessened. I looked up at the clear heaven, saw the fair stars and bright moon, and yet could not feel at peace.

For a long while it seemed I stayed thus, when, suddenly looking 'down the lane as it went abruptly into the glen, under the dark, gloomy shadow of the trees, I saw a figure moving. My first impulse was to retire hastily to the house, as at this hour the lane was seldom intruded upon ; and, moreover, I felt somewhat nervous and timid this night. But as the figure slowly came from out the darkness, I fancied it was a form I well knew. Oh, surely there was no mistaking it ! There was not another form like it in all the world ! Before I could distinguish the face, I knew it was Ralph Esdale who was approaching me. No need to hurry away

now; I stayed by the gate and awaited his coming. It puzzled me to think what had brought him all the way from the Grange this Sabbath night to this little out-of-the-way, sequestered spot. In the short while between when I recognised him and when he stood before me, I had no time to consider the probable causes. Nor did I trouble much, I think; I knew he was near me, and that was enough for me. I saw him throw away the cigar, the smell of which I had detected some time since.

“I am glad I am able to see you,” he said, standing hat in hand. “I was afraid I should not. I have walked by here several times, but could not catch a glimpse of you. I could not call on you to-night at this hour. I thought, perhaps, you might be

in the garden ; I wanted to speak to you so much. I have come from the Grange to do so."

"All that way !" I said, almost incredulously.

"Aye, and if it had been ten times the distance, I would have come," he said.

"Has anything happened ?" I asked.

"Nothing," he answered, with great decision.

"Won't you come in ?" I asked.

"No, thank you ; the night is too lovely to be indoors. I have come to ask if you are offended."

"Offended !" I said, "at what ?"

"At the unfortunate little episode in the church porch this evening."

"What was there to be offended at ?" I

asked, recollecting, with still wounded feelings, the remark of the Lady Adela.

“You must know. Lady Adela should have known better. I am so vexed.”

“Have you come all this way,” I enquired, “to ask me this?”

“Yes,” he answered, quietly.

“It is very kind of you; but would not some other time have done as well, without giving yourself all this trouble?”

“I could not rest until I had seen you to know that you are not vexed—to know that you are not angry with me.”

“Angry with you!” I echoed. “How could I be? You are so kind. I must thank you, oh, so much, for sending your carriage for me.”

“You did not get wet, I hope?” he asked, looking at me across the little gate.

“Oh no, thank you; but I should have, had it not been for your kindness.”

“I shall be able to rest now I am satisfied.”

“I feel sorry you have come all this way,” I said. “How did you manage to leave your guests?”

“I don’t know exactly,” he answered, rather quickly. “I made some excuse, and here I am. I am satisfied now,” he added, after a little pause. “I won’t keep you any longer. Run in, child; the air is damp after the rain.”

“Oh, I shall not hurt,” I said.

“I smell the flowers from here,” Mr. Esdale said, as he leaned forward over the gate. “Will you give me one?”

“Oh, yes. What will you have?”

“What you choose to give me.”

“Suppose I give you a peony?” I said, laughing.

“Then I will have it.”

“Or a little common daisy?” I said, laughing again.

“That will please me as well.”

“You shall have neither,” I said, reaching out my hand and gathering a white pink that was within easy reach. “Take this.”

He took the flower and placed it in his coat.

“Thank you, little Heritage,” he said gently, as he looked at me with his great, tender eyes.

I started. This was the first time he had ever called me Heritage. The name, on his lips, sounded sweeter to me than it ever had before. He noticed me start, for he said—

“Forgive me if I have vexed you. I have no right to call you so ; but remember, I am many, many years older than you ; you are quite a child to me.”

“I am not vexed,” I said. “Please don’t think I am.”

“I will not, now you assure me you are not. But you must not linger here ; it is getting late. Go into the house now child, please.”

He spoke in that sweet way of his that left me no room to disobey, no matter what he asked me to do.

I held out my hand, and he held it long in his. As he held it over the gate, he peered long and closely at me. My eyes met his—the sad look was there that seemed to tell of a deeply-rooted sorrow, and he said—

“Good-night, child,” and added, a moment or two after, ere he released my hand, “Heritage, any man might trust you, I know. There is truth speaking in your face. Happy, happy child.”

I left him and went back to the house; but he did not go till he had seen me safely in, and the door closed.

## CHAPTER XI.

RALPH ESDALE seemed to me more noble than before for this act of kindness. He was afraid that the remark of the Lady Adela's would vex me; and had come all the way from the Grange late in the evening to see if I really was vexed about it. I thought it so kind of him to trouble about me, when he had others near him who had a right to command his sympathy. But, woman like, I could not help feeling a little proud when I remembered his tender solicitude for me, and thought of the haughty Lady Adela. He, of course, loved her; the report must be true!

And as I thought of it, I wished he had

not come to see me. I wished he would keep away from me altogether. Yet, I asked myself, why was he careful of me—why did he speak so kindly? And I remembered his words as he said good-night, “Heritage, any man might trust you;” and I wondered if he could ever have been deceived, for there was such earnestness in his voice as he said it, and looked so tenderly at me.

I had found a Robin Adair now, and could appreciate and fully understand the sad pathos of that dear old song. How innocent and careless were the words I had uttered to Tartar in the wood! How little I thought they would ever have any meaning for me!

And with Ralph Esdale ever in my thoughts the days passed quietly away, with nothing special to relate, till one morning I

was startled by the appearance of one of the Grange servants, who was the bearer of a letter for me. It was a note of invitation to a grand ball in a week's time. I was so astonished that at first I thought I must be mistaken. But no; there was the note on the perfumed paper, with crest and motto and intricate monogram, asking me to be one of the guests at the approaching dance. I wondered at the haughty Lady Mildred asking me; I was fairly astonished. This was no small affair, where only second-rate people would be invited, but a ball of great pretensions, to which all the county people had been asked. I had heard it talked about in the village for some time past now, and had felt little touches of envy as the grand preparations were spoken of. I pictured

Lady Adela in all the magnificence of a ball toilette, with Ralph Esdale by her side ; and oh, the tears would come to my eyes, do what I would to restrain them.

When my astonishment had a little subsided, delighted as I was by the invitation, I faintly began to realise it was impossible for me to accept it. I had nothing to wear. I could not appear at such an entertainment clad unbecoming a guest of the Lady Mildred Esdale. I had no dress in which I could move about in amongst the gorgeous toilettes of the ladies who would be there, nor had I any money to buy one. Father told me to do as I liked—to accept or refuse. Poor man ! had he been able, he would have given me the handsomest dress obtainable.

I felt rather sorry, as I sat down to write

the refusal, to give up all idea of this ball; but, as I thought of Lady Adela, I did not feel sorry. The first time I was asked to the Grange, I refused to go. Perhaps Lady Adela might mistake me again as she had that evening in the church porch. I assured myself I was better away—much better. She, no doubt, loved Mr. Esdale, as report said; very likely the engagement would be made public soon. I would rather not see them together; I would rather not see her listening to his words; I would rather, oh, much rather, not hear him speak tenderly to her as he had to me.

I finished the little note declining the invitation. In the afternoon I took it with me to give to a boy in the village who occasionally went errands for us, to deliver. When

I reached the bridge I stood and looked at the water rushing down from the height over the stones and breaking into spray. I was always fond of looking at this, and the sound of the cascade was pleasant to hear. I leaned on the bridge, and became absorbed in thought. There were no passers-by to disturb me, and I doubt very much whether I should have heard them even if there had been.

The trees screened the sun, and the water looked so cool as it went flowing away. I don't know how long I stayed like this, or how long I should have, but I heard a voice say—

“What are you thinking of so absorbingly that you hear no one approach?” and I looked up to see Mr. Esdale standing by me.

“ Oh, I don’t know exactly,” I said, letting my hand rest in his. “ I was thinking how cool the water must be, and I am so hot.”

“ Come to the Glen Copse yonder ; you can sit by the river’s side there. There is no pleasanter spot in Bentley,” Mr. Esdale said.

“ I am going into the village.”

“ Cannot you go another time ? ”

“ I want to send a letter to your mother.”

“ Shall I take it ? ” he asked.

“ Oh, you won’t like to. I will not trouble you, thank you,” I said.

“ You know I think nothing a trouble for you.”

And he looked at me with the tender smile that always made me hate Lady Adela Garston.

“It is only an answer to the invitation,” I said, feeling I ought to say something about it. “You know Lady Mildred has asked me to the ball.”

“You are coming, of course?” he asked, eagerly.

“No; I have refused.”

“Why, child, why?”

“I do not want to go,” I said, knowing it was very rude, and I hesitated as I said it; but I could not explain the real reason.

“That is unkind,” he said, a little sadly. “I thought you would have enjoyed it; I was so careful you should be asked.”

“It is kind of you; I don’t know how to thank you, but—but—”

“You will come, Heritage, will you not? Say you will.”

I hesitated. How could I refuse this appeal? Yet I thought of Lady Adela; and then I remembered my scanty wardrobe.

“You must not ask me, indeed you must not. I cannot go.”

“But why? Tell me why, child?”

“You will laugh.”

“Have I not told you often I never laugh at you?” and there was just a touch of sadness in his voice.

“I have no ball dress,” I said, “and—and we are poor, very poor.”

The colour came to my cheeks as I made this confession, though I had no need to be ashamed of it.

“Come just as you are,” he said; “but come, Heritage, promise me you will come.”

“What would Lady Mildred say to see me

like this amongst the gay guests ?” I said, smiling, and looking down at my plain muslin dress.

“Say ! What could she say but what every one else would say—there was no one prettier in the room ? Give me your letter ; I will destroy it. When you go home write another one—and accept.”

I thought a minute or two, and then handed him the letter. He did not destroy it as I expected, but put it away, and said—

“I will keep this ; you must write another one to my mother of a different tenor.”

## CHAPTER XII.

Just at this moment, and before we were aware, a carriage came down the hill from the village, and from the livery I could see it was the Esdale's. I could see in it the Lady Mildred Esdale and the Lady Adela Garston. Both the occupants espied us, and the former gave directions for stopping; accordingly the carriage drew up on the bridge by side of us. Mr. Esdale raised his hat; I retreated as far I as could, but I heard the measured tones of the Lady Mildred say—

“We are, as you know, about to make some calls. Will you not come with us?”

“No, thank you,” Mr. Esdale said rather abruptly. “I told you before I was going elsewhere.”

“We have no need to ask *where* you are going,” Lady Adela remarked with a slight sneer.

“I am going to accompany Miss Dane to the village,” Ralph Esdale said, with aggravating coolness, tossing his cigar over the bridge into the river.

Lady Mildred condescendingly gave me a slight bow as my name was mentioned, which I returned as graciously as I could.

“Miss Dane! She can go alone,” the mother said, in a quieter tone, but still loud enough for me to hear.

“Oh, she can certainly go alone, but I like to go with her.”

I began to feel most uncomfortable at being the subject of this contention, and would have walked away, if I could, out of hearing.

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“You are always seeing that Miss Dane,” Lady Mildred said, spitefully; “I cannot think what you see in a child like her. I have spoken to you before about this. Adela is disappointed you are not coming with us.”

“I am sorry to disappoint Lady Adela,” Mr. Esdale said, taking off his hat, “but I am obliged to. Good afternoon.”

He made a sign to the driver to move on, and the carriage rolled away, making a perfect cloud of dust.

“Oh, why did you not go?” I exclaimed. “I wish you had gone.”

“Would you rather I had?”—this reproachfully.

“No—yes—that is; you know what I mean.”

“No, I don’t; tell me.”

“ I am afraid Lady Mildred will blame me.”

“ Never mind.”

“ And Lady Adela !”

“ What of her ? ”

“ She wished you to go with them.”

“ What if she did ? ”

“ I don’t know ; only they say in the village Lady Adela and you—and you—”

I could say no more.

“ Well,” he said, “ what do they say about us ? ”

“ That she and you will one day marry.”

“ Do they ? ” and he heaved a great sigh, and laughed a mocking laugh.

I knew then he did not love her, and I rejoiced, oh, I cannot say how I rejoiced.

“ Are you angry for my saying this ? ” I asked.

“No, child, no—only amused. I suppose people must talk.”

“But your mother likes Lady Adela, does she not?”

“I dare say; but that does not make me like her. Come child, down to the river; we will sit on the bank, and I will tell you a story.”

There was a kind of fierceness in his manner which was wholly foreign to him, and which I had never seen before; all the tenderness and softness seemed gone. I felt quite afraid of him, but only for a moment. He turned to me with the same old, sweet, sad look, as I walked by his side to the Glen Copse.

Under the trees we sat on the bank of the river, where the water flowed over granite

boulders and moss-grown stones, and was fringed by ferns and flowers. He did not speak a word till we were seated, and then, as though there had been no break, he began the story he mentioned. I was ready to listen, and was all eagerness to hear him.

“Heritage, it is my own story I am going to tell you. Will you care to listen?” he asked, throwing aside his hat, and pushing his hand through his hair.

“Oh, yes, indeed.”

“Tell me when I weary you ; but it is not very long.”

He was going to tell me now what I had been so longing to know. Perhaps I should hear now of the sorrow I felt sure he had encountered.

“I loved once.”

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I winced a little as he said this; but it was as I thought.

“I thought my love was returned. I was happy, and she I loved I imagined happy, too. I was mistaken. I discovered one morning she loved another, and had all along been wilfully deceiving me. This was not pleasant to find out. She threw me over—in fact, she what is commonly called jilted me. I went away, travelled; for two years did not see my native land. I thought I had not forgotten; I thought I never could, and returned the same as I left. In the meanwhile, the lady repented, and was ready to renew the vows she had broken. I was a little mistrusting, a little doubting, and would not at once respond to the old love. Time had wrought no change, I thought, but

it was only the fear of again being deceived. I thought when I saw the lady, and heard from her lips the words of love again, I should forgive all. In this belief I waited to see her. Some short time after I returned I did see her—and—and—”

He paused.

“And the lady?” I asked.

“Is the Lady Adela Garston,” he replied, with a cynical smile unlike him.

“I saw her, and I did not love her. The love I had been trying to kill for years was killed the moment I saw her again.”

“And you do not love her now?” I asked.

“No,” he replied, “we are friends—distant friends, that is all.”

He turned to me then, and said with the sad smile stealing over his face—

“Do you know what wrought this change, Heritage?”

“I cannot guess,” I said.

“I will tell you the night of the ball. I will not finish my story till then. You *must* come, Heritage, to hear it.”

“Oh, yes, I will,” I said with fervour.

He got up from the grass, and I as well; and together we walked to the little wicket gate of Glen Cottage. There he left me.

I think father was rather glad than otherwise when he heard I had changed my mind, and intended going to the ball at the Grange. Mr. Raymont and his wife kindly offered to take me with them, and their escort I was only too glad to avail myself of. Without them I could not have gone; there was no one to take me. This being settled, there


arose within myself the great question of a fitting costume. It being altogether impossible for me to procure one to vie with or even equal those of the guests present, I was perforce compelled to fall back on my limited wardrobe. I remembered Mr. Esdale's words, and troubled little what others thought of me, so that he was pleased. I looked forward with pleasure to the day now; it was something so new, so pleasant for me to partake in any such gaiety. I did not see Mr. Esdale again before the day of the ball; I did not meet him in my walks, and he did not come to the cottage.

## CHAPTER XIII.

THE long-looked for day arrived at last, and I felt rather a drooping of spirits. The idea of meeting the Lady Mildred arrayed in all the splendour of her station, and I so simply dressed, was not pleasant. Besides, there was the scrutinising gaze of the Lady Adela, who would look down with becoming dignity upon me in the plain toilette I was to appear in. When I was dressed I was almost afraid to look at myself in the glass. I wondered what he would think, what Ralph Esdale would say to himself as he saw me. I was obliged to wear the dress I did ; I had no other, and I could not buy a new one. If I had, we should have had to stint

in many ways ; and I could not bear that father, in his declining years, and under the present circumstances, should be denied one comfort that we could now in justice afford ourselves. So I wore a black silk just thrown open at the throat with a quantity of white lace, and a few sprigs of white jasmine amongst it ; and in my hair I placed some blossoms of the same sweet-smelling flower. Thus simply attired I went with my kind friends to the Grange.

Lady Mildred received me with her usual chilling manner, and I fancied looked with becoming surprise on my poor toilette. Whatever I imagined I should feel was nothing compared to what I really did experience amongst all the grandeur and magnificence. The gleam and glimmer of silk and satin, the display of



diamonds and other stones, so awed me that I was ready to run away and go back to the peace and quiet of our little home. This I felt was no place for me. It seemed almost an insult to appear as I did amongst all the beauty and grace assembled—to be the one dark spot upon so brilliant a gathering. How I wished I had never come! How I wished I could escape from all the glitter and glare, from all the noise and stir! What right had I to be here? But had *he* not asked me? I tried to shrink away from the gay revellers; I tried to hide amongst the heavy drapery.

The music began, the dancers bestirred themselves, and I, unnoticed, sat quietly down by the side of Mrs. Rayment to witness the movements of the throng. I tried

to find out Mr. Esdale, to single him from the rest. I had no difficulty in doing this, for he was taller and handsomer than any one present. I knew he had not seen me, for I felt sure if he had he would have spoken to me. I wondered who his partner was. I tried hard to see her. She was a lady I had never seen before. He was talking very earnestly to her, and I felt a jealous pang ; but then I recollected he was obliged to make himself agreeable to his guests. I felt dazzled by the brilliancy and splendour of the scene ; the fairy-like room with its festoons of flowers, waxen lights, and countless mirrors. When the quadrille was over the Lady Adela Garston strolled by me, leaning on the arm of a tall guardsman, resplendent in a magnificent toilette of cloudy-

white and delicate rose-pink that shimmered in the brilliant glare as she passed along. She would not have noticed me, for I sat far back in a recess, had not her cavalier espied and directed his glance towards me. She just turned her head so as to see who I was, and then, with an indignant toss and haughty air, swept majestically on. I was a little awed at this, and shrank further back in the corner. She was, no doubt, amused at my presence here, and more so at the inappropriateness of my humble, black silk dress. I should have liked a costume similar to hers for this night—as I tried to hide myself behind the heavy curtains I longed for such—but I could not have worn it with such becoming grace, with such exquisite and queen-like charm. I noticed her later on the centre of

a gay circle of admirers, all asking for permission to place their names on her card.


Before the second dance commenced I was astonished to see the Lady Mildred Esdale bring the guardsman, who had been Lady Adela's partner previously, up to me and introduce him as Captain Eversley. He had singled me out then—I was not to remain unnoticed. He solicited me for the dance about to begin. I at first thought of refusing, but I was a little proud of being asked, and handed him my card. How blank it looked! Not a single engagement on it. He asked to put his name down for another; I allowed him, and then left my snug little corner on his arm. He was very kind to me, but I felt very shy and ashamed as I saw all the grand dresses about me. I looked for

Ralph Esdale, and saw him dancing with Lady Adela. She seemed happy. Oh, and I thought he seemed happy, too.

After the dance was over Captain Eversley took me back to Mrs. Raymont ; and from her side I did not move again until he claimed me for his partner. And Mr. Esdale had not spoken to me, had not come near me. And he had asked me so particularly to come. I was ready to cry. I noticed he had danced twice with the Lady Adela, and had neglected me. I so wanted him to ask me to be his partner, but he seemed to keep rigidly away. I would not get up again ; I was happier far watching the dancers from my quiet corner. So the evening wore on, and I was beginning to feel faint and sick. I had heard rumours of Ralph Esdale and Lady Adela, in which

their names were coupled with certain knowledge. I could not for a moment think he had told me anything but truth when he said he did not love her now; but these whisperings seemed to affright and make me feel cold and chill. Had he seen me, and was he ashamed of me? Whilst I was speculating thus I saw him get up with the Lady Adela for the third time; then I felt he must love her—I was certain of it. The room seemed to go round; I scarcely knew where I was. But why should I mind his dancing with her? What right had I to love Ralph Esdale?

I wanted air; the atmosphere was heavy—sickening. I felt choking; I clutched the heavy curtain; I tried to steady myself, so that Mrs. Rayment might not notice any-



thing. I whispered to her; she did not heed me. I rose and walked as best I could to the window. It was open, and overhung with curtains of lace. I pushed them aside, and went forth into the glorious summer night. No one had noticed me I felt sure, everyone was busy with the dance. The moon was shining; the stars were bright; the air was full of perfume. How thankful I was to be out of that room, how thankful for a breath of fresh air! I walked along the broad stone terrace till I found a seat in a kind of alcove commanding a view of the park. Large vases of geraniums were near me that looked almost white in the moonlight. I saw the large shadows of mighty trees on the velvet turf of the lawn; and beyond, glimmering through the foliage of

the park like the sheen of silver, the placid, tranquil lake. The music was borne to me from the ball-room, and sounded fairy-like in the distance. I felt free now, under no restraint, and the tears that I had striven to keep back began to flow as they would. I cried like a little child ; I sobbed aloud ; there was no one near to hear I thought, but I heard, after a little while, a voice say—

“Heritage, why are you crying ?”

I had no need to look up, I knew well enough who asked the question ; that voice belonged to none other than Ralph Esdale.

“I don’t know,” I said. “But please, Mr. Esdale, don’t trouble.”

“But I do trouble,” he said, sitting down next me. “You must not stay here. Are you tired ? Do you not care for dancing ?”

“Oh, yes,” I answered, “only—only—”

“Only what, Heritage?”

“I am out of place; I am not dressed like the others. I ought never to have come.”

“But I asked you, child. You look better in that pretty dress than any one here in all the magnificence of her gorgeous attire. Don’t fear on that score, Heritage.”

“I will go home,” I said; “I must not stay much longer.”

“You have to dance with me once or twice, yet.”

“But there are others,” I said, “whom you must ask.”

“I have asked *you*,” he said, sadly. “Will you refuse me?”

“Not if you care to dance with me.”

“You know I do, child,” and he looked

down tenderly at me. "Give me that flower in your dress, Heritage," he added.

"It is almost faded, and it is only a sprig of jasmine."

"Never mind ; may I have it ?"

"Oh, yes, if you care to ;" and I gave him the flower.

"Have you forgotten what I was to tell you to-night ?" he asked after a little pause.

"You were to finish the story—your story."

"Would you care to hear it ?"

"So much."

"I think I told you I had ceased to love Lady Adela ; was that where I left off ?"

"Yes," I answered, "and you said to-night you would tell me the reason."

"So I will ; but will you be angry ?"

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“How can I be?”

He drew nearer to me as I asked this, and laid his hand on the balustrade of the terrace, just above my head, and said—

“The reason I ceased to love her was because I had seen you.”

“Because you had seen me,” I echoed almost inaudibly.

“Yes, because I had seen you, and loved you. Are you angry, Heritage? I saw you in the wood, I heard you sing, and from the moment I spoke to you I found you had crept into my life. Oh, child, I have been afraid to speak; you are young, I am old to you; I have no right to ask you to be my wife,” and I fancied I heard something like a sob burst from him.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE words were like words from heaven to me; I was in a transport of happiness. Ralph Esdale, the man I would have laid down my life for, loved me and had chosen me from out all the world to be his wife. I could not speak, my lips tried to move, but nothing could escape me.

“You are vexed, child,” he said, oh so sadly; “I don’t wonder at it. Forgive me, but your sweet, artless ways, your trust and simplicity have made me love you. Oh, heaven! why did I ever see you, if you are to blight my life. I have found happiness within my grasp at last; it is yours, child, to give me, it is yours, child, to take away from me.”

He took my hand in his, and peered eagerly into my face as he waited for me to speak.

"Mr. Esdale—Ralph, Ralph," I said, my voice trembling as I spoke his name, "I do love you—I do love you."

"This is more than I deserve," he murmured, "this is more than I deserve."

He drew me to him, my head rested on his breast, and as I upturned my face to him I felt his lips pressed long and close to mine. Ralph, Ralph—mine at last! The joy of these moments I cannot describe; all the weary weeks of disappointment and sadness at an end now! No further need for jealousy; no vain hopes, no distracting doubts.

"Is it possible," he said, holding me in

his arms, "that you love me, I, who am so old to you?"

"Quite," I answered.

"Don't deceive yourself, little one, don't deceive me; tell me whilst there is time if you have a doubt, but for God's sake don't find it out when it's too late," he said with vehemence.

"I love you; I have never loved before. I shall never love but you to the world's end," I said.

"Heritage, my darling, my own little one, mine to guard and watch over till life shall end for me!" he said, folding me in his big arms.

"And you," I said, "are my Robin Adair."

"Yes; you have found one now though you thought you never should."

“What will Lady Mildred say?” I asked, almost feeling frightened as I mentioned her name.

“A great deal, I dare say; but it will make no difference to me. You, Heritage, shall be my wife, and no other ever shall be, I vow it.”

“Hush!” I said, “don’t say that. You may grow tired of me.”

“Are you afraid to trust me?”

“No,” I answered; “you love me.”

“So dearly that I would give up every hope, every joy in life, so that you might be happy; so fondly and truly that come what may, you will ever be to me my own little Heritage.”

I smiled as I looked up at him, and he smiled back on me.

"You do not love Lady Adela now?" I asked.

"Did I ever love her? Can you call that love which alters, which dies out for ever? I was younger then; now I am older, and know that you are my manhood's choice—the joy of my life."

I looked up, for I thought I heard a sound, and behold the Lady Mildred standing by us. Ralph had me firm in his clasp—my big, tender Ralph—or I believe I should have run away. She stared at us with unspeakable horror; she almost glared at me.

"Ralph," she said in bitterest accents, "I was told you were here."

"Very kind, mother, whoever told you," he said, gaily.

"This is not becoming; you, the master

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of the house, to absent yourself from your guests. You have missed four dances, and one I believe Adela told me you were to give her. I am vexed and surprised at you. Why do you do it?"

He rose from the bench and drew me with him, and stood facing his mother in the moonlight.

"Because I prefer talking here with my future wife."

Lady Mildred fell back a few steps; she tottered; I thought she would have fallen, she clutched with a firm grip the balustrade. She seemed as though she had been dealt a blow—a blow indeed it was to her. All her cherished plans upset, all her schemings overthrown.

"Is this madness?" she managed to utter

after a few moments ; “ or—or—oh, Ralph, you will kill your mother.”

“ Nay, mother, nothing of the sort ; you must like Heritage for my sake, she will like you if you will let her. Come, mother, I will tell you of this to-morrow ; we will go back to the ball room now.”

He put his mother’s arm in his and led her back to the room. I followed.

Then everything went on as though no break had occurred. I was so happy now ; I did not heed my poor, simple dress. Ralph was mine—that was all I cared for. I danced with him several times, and people began to ask who the little girl in black was. Lady Adela looked with disdain upon me, and Lady Mildred ignored me quite. I cared for nothing now I knew that Ralph loved me, and he was

mine. My Ralph ! my Ralph ! How happy I was. When I laid my head, tired and weary, on the pillow in the glorious dawn of the summer morn, I fell asleep murmuring his name—Ralph ! Ralph !

## CHAPTER XV.

It was some time before I could fully understand the happiness that had come to me. Father was pleased that I was happy ; and when Ralph asked him he gave his consent readily. But the Lady Mildred was very averse to my entering the family, and it was not until she had thoroughly investigated and found out the antecedents and position of the Danes, that she would at all recognise me. She had settled within herself that her son was to marry Lady Adela Garston, and anyone who upset that arrangement was naturally looked upon unfavourably by her. Poor Ralph ! I am afraid he had a sorry time of it ; the great mistake he was making,

the *mésalliance* he was about to contract, was daily dinned into his ears. I sometimes felt that I ought, perhaps, to give him up, and let him marry where his mother thought he would be forming a match in accordance with his position. But he loved me and I loved him, what else was there to be considered? There was no great difference in our family distinctions; perhaps, none at all. I think if the Danes could not have boasted a few ancestors, Lady Mildred would have at once quitted the Grange and disowned her son for ever. As it was she only just tolerated me, and always looked upon me as beneath her and altogether unworthy of her son. But Ralph loved me, and I did not fear. I would not have disgraced him for all the world; if I had thought there was that difference in our

social positions that did not warrant my becoming his wife, I would have resigned him, and bade him seek another mate. I often wondered what he saw in me to like, for there were so many ladies of rank and title he was accustomed to meet, that it seemed strange he should choose me who was so different from them all.

Some of the happiest days I ever knew glided by. Our engagement was kept very quiet, it was not generally known. It was settled we were to be married in the late autumn. Ralph would not wait any longer. I had no dowry to bring him; I could only give him myself, and that he thought the richest gift in all the world.

How the hours used to fly as we sat together in the dear old garden of the cot-

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tage, amongst the sweet-scented flowers, and within hearing of the rushing of the river! How we wanted them to linger! But they would not. Father used to stand in the porch and look at us, then he would smile and go back into the house. Tartar would lie near us, ready to give us warning should we be disturbed. Dear old Ralph was never tired of coming to the Glen Cottage. He always found me there, I did not go out much now, for father seemed getting very weak and ill. I did not like to leave him long alone.

Lady Mildred once honoured me with a visit, but she treated me with such coolness, such indifference, that I was glad when she left. Lady Adela left the Grange with the efflux of other visitors.

As I used to look at Ralph with his sweet,

sad face and his smile of tenderness, I knew that henceforth it was my lot in life to be his one comfort and joy. Lady Adela Garston had completely passed out of his existence, as completely as she had passed from mine. I wonder if she ever reflected what she had lost, or considered how cruelly she had wasted some of the fair years of his life. She had given him up—my gentle, tender, brave, noble Ralph—had thrown him over for another ; but she was ready to come back to him again when it was too late, too late. He never spoke of her to me, nor I to him. I knew it was not a pleasant recollection of his life, the past connected with her ; and it made no difference to me now that I knew he loved me.

The summer was still lingering ; the

evening was hot and sultry, and I was sitting at the piano in our little room, with the lattice window open wide to let the still scented air come in. Father was sitting in the garden with Tartar by his side. I had been playing some of my favourite songs, and had been amusing myself so for some time. From the piano I could see the window with the roses peeping in, and ever and anon I would look across at the trees and flowers beyond. I was thinking of Ralph as usual, and as I took up "Robin Adair" I remembered that day, many weeks ago now, when I sang it, as I thought, to myself and Tartar, in the little, lonely wood. I had sung it many times since then; Ralph was so fond of it, and so was I, too. I placed it on the piano now, though I needed

it not, knowing it so well. I saw some writing of Ralph's upon it, where he had written one day. I looked at his words in pencil, and valued the song—oh, so much, for the sake of his writing. I said to myself I would put it carefully away, where I could be sure it would be safe—the words never effaced, the song as he had written upon it. With this determination I put it away, came back to the piano, and began to sing the familiar words I loved so well—

What's this dull town to me, Robin's not near?

“But Robin is near,” a voice interrupted me, and I, smilingly, turned to the window to see dear old Ralph's handsome face, with its long, fair drooping moustache, looking in, surrounded by roses and evergreens. He

leaned in at the casement, and the smell of his cigar was wafted towards me.

“Finish your song, my child,” he said, “then come to me.”

“I will come to you first,” I said, “and finish the song after.”

I got up, and went to him. He reached in at the window, drew me to him with one arm, and kissed me tenderly as was his wont. He looked so handsome as he leaned as I have described; I felt so proud of him, and so grateful for his loving me.

“Run, finish your song; I will listen here whilst I finish my cigar,” he said, releasing me; and I went back to the piano to sing “Robin Adair.”

I finished the song, and he came into the room to me.

"Heritage, my child," he said, as I sat down beside him, "I have some sad news for you; but nothing that need greatly upset you."

"Is it about yourself?" I asked, eagerly.

"I shall have to leave you for a while."

"Leave me! Oh, Ralph, not for long?" I cried, "Oh, not for long?"

"For a month, I think," he said. "I have had a telegram to-day from Rome; my dearest friend—you have heard me speak of Jack Rayner—is lying dangerously ill; he wants to see me. I cannot refuse to go; you, Heritage, would not wish me."

"Oh, no. I am sorry he is ill, but—but do not be away so far longer than you can help."

"You may depend upon it, I shall not be, little one. I start to-morrow early."

“ So soon.”

“ I have no time to lose. I may not find him living when I reach there.”

“ You will let me know that you are well, will you not ? ” I said.

“ Yes ; and I will tell you the name of the hotel where to write to me. Let me hear from you often, child. I shall stay with poor Rayner for a while, if I find him living when I reach Rome. Poor old fellow ! he and I are sworn friends. I shall tell him all about you, Heritage.”

“ Come back to me soon, Ralph,” I said, leaning my head upon his shoulder ; “ come back to me safe and well.”

He smiled as he kissed me, and led me forth into the garden. We talked with father for some time, and when he went into

the house we remained in the air, with the moon and stars above us. Ralph had come to say good-bye ; it was with fear and trembling I let him go from me. We lingered long in the old garden ; we listened to the river as it flowed noisily on ; we put off as long as we could the final good-bye. Ralph held me clasped in his arms ; he showered kisses on me ; I clung to him as though I could not part from him. I wonder if there was any foreboding, any foreknowledge of what was going to happen ? Oh, I know not, but I often recalled in the days that followed, the night as I parted from Ralph under the clear, unclouded, star-besprinkled sky, by the wicket gate of the Glen Cottage.

“ Good-night, and good-bye, my child,” he

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said, "think of me till I return; I shall always think of you. Know, Heritage, you are my life and hope—my all in the world. My wife you will be in a few months. I trust you as I trust myself. Nothing need ever separate us; child, child, you will never know how I love you."

He bent down, and kissed me again, and then stole away. I watched him till he disappeared round the bend of the lane, amongst the heavy foliage. I went back to the house, sorrowful at Ralph's departure, yet happy in knowing of his love.

## CHAPTER XVI.

I CANNOT tell how much I missed him ; the days seemed so long without seeing him. I tried to be joyous and bright, for father began to get very ill, and I was anxious to do all I could to make him happy. A day or two after Ralph had been away, I remember father was much better, and I decided to go with Tartar for a long walk. I left him with some papers before him ; he told me he was going to write. He kissed me tenderly, and said he hoped I should enjoy myself. I went forth with a light heart, for seeing him so much better made me very glad. Something or other seemed to tell me to return before I had been as far as I intended. To this day I can

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never tell what prompted me. I reached home some hours before I should have, had I gone the distance I meant to when I set out. I wondered as I reached the gate what father would say to my coming back so early ; and, gaily singing the fragment of a song, went into the house, and into the room where I left him. The writing materials were scattered over the table, and his head was resting on it, his hands by his side. I thought he had fallen asleep, and was afraid to disturb him. I quietly went to the window and sat down by it. For some time I stayed thus, expecting him to wake, but he made no movement. At last I went to him. His hands were cold and stiff—oh, horror ! his breathing had stopped—he was dead.

I called for the servant ; she came. She

could only tell me she had not been in the room since I left. I sent her wildly for the doctor, and also for Mr. Rayment. I shall never forget the suspense I suffered till they came. The former arrived first, and in an instant pronounced, as I already knew, life to be extinct. The blow was terrible to me ; I did not know whether I dreamed. It was a comfort to see the dear, kind, benevolent face of our rector. He was so kind to me ; he treated me like his child. I had nothing touched, I would have everything left as I found it, and when, under Mr. Rayment's direction—I was passive in his hands—the body was removed to another room, I locked the door and took the key myself.

I shall pass over as quickly as I can this part of my story.

When all was quiet and still, in the faint twilight as the day declined, I re-entered the room to see the papers that were strewn upon the table. There were many ; some extracts from books, favourite passages from different authors ; others, lists of books ; and letters from people of whom I had never heard. At last I came to the one he was busy upon when he died. It was his handwriting from the beginning, and the large blot at the end told me where the pen had slipped from him when his hand fell lifeless by his side. I read the paper, and when I reached as far as he had written, I was as rigid as stone. I did not know where I was. I was like one gone mad. Reason seemed to desert me. Tears refused to flow. The agony of the moments I cannot describe.

I should have been thankful to die. I could not blame him who now was dead for any wrong he had done me—for it was done so lovingly and tenderly ; but had he spared me this, oh, had he spared me this ! I might never have known the terrible secret had he lived a little longer ; he might have destroyed the only living witness. Now here it was before me, evidence convincing, overpowering, to show that I had no right to the name of Dane. This was how the paper ran—

“To Heritage.—To be opened by her and her alone after my death.

“RICHARD DANE.”

And it went on as follows :—

“What I am going to tell you, perhaps,

there is no need of your ever knowing; but, under all circumstances, I think it is right. At all events, I shall be no more amongst you, and you will be married to a husband who loves you devotedly, and this revelation, then, can make no difference to him. I will not tell you in my lifetime. I never wish you to consider me otherwise than your father, for you have been a daughter to me when I should have been alone in the world. I may destroy this when I have written it; then you will never know the secret which sometimes I think you should know. Now you have arrived at womanhood, it seems difficult to know what to do. Heritage, you are not my daughter, you are no relation to me.

Many, many years ago, when in India

with my regiment, a fair young girl whom I had loved deeply in the old country, was brought out to be my wife. For twelve months I was happy; then a little baby girl was born to us, but it cost the mother her life.

“I shall never forget the anguish I suffered, the misery I endured; and this was heightened when the innocent child was taken from me also. I was as one gone mad. At this time a good-hearted fellow, my servant, who had served me faithfully for years, took a fever that was prevalent at the time, and died. Poor Matthew Murray, on his death-bed, begged me to look after his wife and child, who were alone in this strange land, uncared and unprovided for. I promised. The poor woman soon caught

the malignant fever that had carried her husband away. I visited her in the hospital once or twice, but at last she succumbed to the fearful malady. The babe she handed over to me, into my charge. I took it, and promised her as I had promised her husband, to befriend it. It was a little girl, born within a few days of my own. I said to myself, cannot this comfort me for the loss of mine? Cannot I rear the little orphan child as tenderly as I would have done my own? I was very lonely, and I kissed the child as I said she should henceforth be my daughter.

“You are that child, Heritage; you are the daughter of my servant; you are Heritage Murray. I brought you home with me; it was never known but that you were

my daughter, and now it never will be. Forgive me if I have done you wrong—I tried so to do my duty; but whatever happens, child, know this, that I could not have loved you more, you could not in any sense have been more my child than the little baby who sleeps far away under the green turf on the slope of the Neilgherries. I love you, child, as though you were my own, and you have been my own, God knows—God knows. Ah, Heritage, you—”

## CHAPTER XVII.

THAT was all. A large blot showed where the pen had fallen. My first impulse was to destroy the paper—oh ! only for a second, I am thankful to say ; then I knew how wrong it would be. I could not harm him by a single thought, he who was now beyond the reach of human call ; he who had been to me a father, and as father I should always consider him. Perhaps, had he lived, I should never have known this ; he might never have revealed it ; he might have destroyed the paper as soon as it was written.

I thought of Ralph, Ralph Esdale—my Ralph. Ah ! he could be mine no longer now. Who was I ? Heritage Murray, the

daughter of a regimental servant. How could I wed with him—the master of the Grange, the descendant of a direct line of ancestors? And I had considered myself a Dane, a fit mate for the Esdales. It was very hard to bear. To give up Ralph was like giving up life itself. I tried so hard to see the right path to take, the one where right and honour directed me. It was plain before me I must give up Ralph, and go far away where I could not be found, where I should be entirely unknown.

Lady Mildred would have the triumph now. She was right; I was no fit mate for her son.

I sat alone in the room. Night came on. I still stayed; I seemed unable to move, and only when morning came did I fall asleep.

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The events of the next few days I only indistinctly remember. Mr. Raymont was with me; but for him I don't know what I should have done. The paper that held such a terrible secret I kept with me; I let no one see it; I would not let it go from me. We buried him who had been more than a father to me under the tall elms that overshadowed the churchyard of Bentley. All this took only a few days, whilst I moved about like one in a dream. I saw plainly the course of duty that was before me, and accordingly, the day after the funeral, went to the Grange to see Lady Mildred. She received me kindly, kindlier than she ever had before; I suppose on account of my sad bereavement.

Though she had not been to see me, almost

daily she had sent enquiries by one of the liveried servants. I was too ill and sad to talk much, so without any unnecessary preparation I gave her the paper to read, that bore the last writing of Richard Dane.

Lady Mildred was astonished, as justly she might have been. She looked at me with a scornful glance. Whatever she may have considered me before, of course now I was but the most contemptible *parvenu*. I could offer no explanation. I had this morning received a letter from Ralph. I had answered it, too, as though nothing had happened; I did just mention my father's death—I must still call him so—and that was all. I told him not to hurry back on that account, and assured him I was quite well. Lady Mildred asked with asperity if I had heard,

and seemed very annoyed when I told her I had.

"What do you mean to do?" she asked, drawing herself up, and eyeing me suspiciously.

"Give him up," I said, my voice scarcely heard.

"Good girl," she said; "of course it is the only thing you can do. My son cannot marry a servant's child."

The tears flowed long and copiously. My heart seemed ready to burst; but Lady Mildred had no mercy; she showed me no pity. She did not heed the trouble I had been through, the sorrow I had borne; she only rejoiced that her son was able to be free from me.

I told her of my intention to leave

Bentley at once. I begged her to keep it from her son in her letters, which she was only too ready and glad to assent to. I did not tell her of my straitened circumstances—of the little income ceasing with poor father's death. I did not tell her I must go forth into the world prepared to win my bread, prepared to work hard for my living. I only asked her to keep what I had told her a strict secret, and promised she should not hear of me again. From the window I could see the very spot where on that moonlight night, a few weeks ago, Ralph had told me that he loved me. My eyes were blinded with tears.

I rose and left her. Cruel, heartless woman! As the door closed upon me, I had seen her for the last time in this world.

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“Ralph, Ralph!” was all I could murmur. Oh, if he had been here at this time! I could not let him marry me, and know what I did. I loved him too much to let him sacrifice himself for me. So I willingly gave him up to save him from reproach—to save him from disgracing the name of his forefathers.

To Mr. Rayment, who was the truest friend possible, I confided my intention of leaving the village. No persuasion on his part could change my decision. All the furniture of the little cottage was sold; I was sorely glad of the money. I made up my mind to go to London, and told Mr. Rayment so, but I did not tell him of the need there was for me to work. I wanted no one to know of my whereabouts; I wanted to be lost entirely in the great world.

One more sad blow fell upon me, and my cup of misery was full, overflowing. One morning I rose to find faithful old Tartar dead.

So he was buried in the garden of the dear old Glen Cottage, amongst the sweet-scented flowers, were some of my happiest days had been passed.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

I WAS staying at the Rectory ; it was the last evening of my stay in Bentley. To-morrow I was to go forth into the great busy world—alone. I almost feared, for I had been so carefully nurtured, so delicately reared, that I had had no contact with the hardships of life. I made up my mind to seek London, that being the place where I was most likely to get employment. The only thing I could do was to teach ; I thought I was capable of that. I had no friend to go to, no relation in the world. My lot now was very sad. Mr. Raymont was very kind to me, but I could only tell him I intended going to London. I could give him no address, nor would I, had

I been able, for I wanted to be left quite alone so that my whereabouts need never be known to Ralph. I knew I could not bear to see him now I was unable to love him, now that it was wrong for me to do so. But how my heart ached, how my heart ached !

This last evening of my sojourn in Bentley I strolled forth from the Rectory alone, to take farewell of all the dear old surroundings. I went to the Glen Cottage, lingered in the old garden, stayed by Tartar's resting-place, and looked lovingly at the closed windows and the deserted house.

I took a bunch of the flowers I loved so well to go with me into the great city I was to journey to to-morrow. I stood on the bridge and heard the roar of the water as it dashed on, and watched it the other side as it

flowed more placidly on. I went to the church and stood by the grave of him whom I had always known as father. This was the saddest parting of all. I went away at length with slow, and almost tottering steps. I felt faint and sick at heart. I wished I could rest quietly by his side and be at peace. Then I turned my footsteps homewards. I reached the high ground and gazed down on the village. The autumn tints were beginning to show with great prominence. The leaves were in some places brown and golden, and contrasted with charming effect the green ones that had not yet turned colour.

The pasture fields were green and fair-looking ; there were also some with tall wheat waving and bending gracefully to the evening breeze. I could see in some parts the

stubble where the stalks had fallen before the sickle. There were reapers in the fields now, and gleaners busily at work. They seemed happy, for from a field near a song of harvest time was borne to me on the breeze. Not a care they seemed to have, not a trouble in the world. I sighed as I sat by a gate and watched the happy light-hearted throng. The setting sun was gilding the hills, and streaming down a glorious flood of light upon the village. The church was covered with a soft light ere it was finally left to darkness and solitude. The corn fields looked like a sheet of gold, and the whole landscape for a few moments seemed to glisten with the last rays of the sun. It sank to rest at last, and left me still standing by the gate. The breeze blew up chilly,

but still I moved not, I was attracted to the spot.

And the reapers reap'd  
And the sun fell, and all the land was dark.

And all the land was dark ; aye, verily, it all seemed dark to me. Father dead, Tartar dead, and Ralph lost to me for ever ! What had I done to deserve such a fate ? I, who only little more than a week ago was the happiest in the land, was now the most miserable and wretched. I leaned on the gate, my head in my hands, and moaned aloud. To-morrow at this hour I should be in a crowded city—a stranger, jostled by the rude crowd, with not a friend near me. The peace around, made me feel more acutely the losses I was bewailing. I said farewell as I turned away from the gate, and went back to the Rectory.

I was startled by the news that awaited me. I seemed almost bewildered by the many events that were taking place around my quiet life. The Lady Mildred Esdale had died suddenly, she had been seized with a fit from which she had not recovered. Her son had been telegraphed for immediately. I could do nothing, I could offer no comfort to any one. Ralph was many miles away in a foreign country, and if he had been here? Well, I can't say, I can't say. He could never learn now from his mother anything about me ; he would have to be content with all the explanation I gave him. I could not be cruel to him ; I would not have wronged him for all the world. I would not disgrace his name ; I was too proud. Before I went to bed I wrote him a letter, which I sent to

the Grange on the morrow to await his arrival.  
This is how it ran—

“MY DEAR MR. ESDALE,

“Don’t think unkindly of me ; I cannot say much, but this is to tell you I can never marry you. Please do not try to find me ; it is my wish ; it can do us neither any good, and may work much harm. I cannot tell you how it grieves me to tell you this ; it wrings my very heart. I am alone in the world now, I have no friends. I have not ceased to love you ; please do not think that. It is because I love you so much that I wish you to forget me. Good-bye, God bless you. Forgive, forget, and do not think too harshly of poor suffering

“HERITAGE.”

I purposely avoided putting any name, but the simple one that I had never borne but by just right.

Early in the morning I was driven with my one box that contained all my worldly possessions into the town some miles distant, and ere the sun had fully dispelled the early September fog, I was being dashed along in the train from this remote little west country village to the far distant London. And as I bade farewell to the home I had been so happy in, I bade farewell also to the name I had wrongly borne from childhood, and went forth into the world to battle with it, as Heritage Murray, the name that was my own.

The bustle, clamour, and noise at the station astonished me. I was afraid to move.

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Here was I alone in the great city, not knowing where to go, not knowing what to do. At last I timidly asked a porter to look for my box, which he obligingly did. I then ventured to ask him to call a cab, this also he complied with, but when he asked where I wished to be driven to, I was fairly bewildered. For a moment I hesitated, then told him the nearest hotel. The rattle over the streets seemed to stun me, and I was thankful and glad when I was deposited at a grand looking building.

As I fell asleep that night, I cannot give any adequate idea of my feelings. With daylight I was awake, then I began to consider what steps I must take to obtain an engagement as governess. I know my little stock of money would not last long, I knew

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I must be as economical as I could. I went out early and sought for lodgings ; it was long before I could find any to suit me, and when I returned to the hotel I was faint and weary. I soon moved into them, and quickly became on friendly terms with the landlady. I advertised for a situation, it was weary work and disheartening. It was long before I got any answer, and longer before I could get an engagement. At last I was successful, just when my money was almost exhausted, and I thought starvation would be before me. I have passed over the torture and agony I suffered during this period. I do not like dwelling on this time, the most miserable of my existence.

All colour had faded from my cheek, all life and spirit had gone from me, and I be-

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lieve it was more from pity than anything else that the Hon. Mrs. Lionel Loftus engaged me as governess to her three young children. The close, stifling air of London had had its effect upon me, and coming fresh from the country I felt it all the more. I was glad to leave the great busy city and go into the country once more.

Though it was not so pretty a neighbourhood as either where my original home was, or Bentley, yet it had much to recommend it. The home of the Loftus's was in one of the Midland counties, within an easy distance of London. The family consisted of the Hon. Lionel Loftus, his wife, three young children—my pupils—and a grown-up son and daughter. I went to them as soon as possible, and right glad was I to be settled.

They were very kind to me, pitied me, and tried to make me forget the past. They knew me simply as Miss Murray, an orphan who had just lost her father. They knew no more ; how they would have pitied me had they known all !

Now the excitement, worry, and anxiety were over, I had time to fully realise all that had taken place within the last few months. Ralph lost to me for ever, was a thought that well nigh drove me mad. I should never see him again I felt sure. What good if I could ? I had no right to love him, the master of Bentley Grange ; I, a servant's child.

## CHAPTER XIX.

Oh, the days of misery I passed I shall never forget. Poor father! I could not think of him but kindly, only why had he ever brought me up in ignorance of my birth? This fatal calamity would never have befallen me then. Ralph, Ralph! was all that I could cry, was all that I could murmur in my deep distress. Ralph Esdale was never out of my thoughts; and, as the days rolled into months, and the months rolled into years, he was as fresh in my memory as he was dear in my heart. Ralph, Ralph, for two years I never heard of you, not even a sound of your name, save when I uttered it aloud. And the days of intense suffering became lessened as the two years passed by; father's

memory became a cherished remembrance, Tartar I thought of as my faithful old dog ; but Ralph, I could only think of as my Ralph. Every one of the family I was amongst was kind to me ; I learned to like them all.

Two years had nearly passed away. Two weary, dreary, unhappy years; the unhappiest I had ever known. I was learning to look back with fond memories on the past ; I thought now I could bear to enter into some of the old enjoyments once more. But I was not the same as of old ; I was very different. With the change of name there had become a change of person.

I was very mistaken when I thought I could lightly refer and be brought face to face with the past. I was undeceived in this wise.

One day in summer, when all the land was clothed in beauty, and flowers bloomed, and birds sang, we young people were in the schoolroom. Lessons were over for the day; the three children were running in and out at the open window, and their eldest sister, Jessie, was talking with me. She was at the piano trying songs, and I was listening. I had brought down, for the first time since I had been there, my portfolio—my treasure brought from the little room at Bentley. Jessie was pleased to get the songs, for many of them were very old, and she had never heard of them. I was some little distance from the piano, and did not notice what she chose until she began the air. At last, after trying several, I heard her begin “Robin Adair.” The old chord was touched; old

memories were renewed as fresh as yesterday ; the tears streamed down my cheeks. I rushed to her side, and almost snatched the song from her as I said—

“ Oh, Jessie, you may sing every song I have, but not this one ; please, not this one.”

I left her side with the song clasped to me, and went to my own room. There I looked at it, read and re-read it ; hummed it to myself, and saw the words he had written one happy day long ago. In hours of idleness, in hours of happiness they were traced. I saw the well-known handwriting ; I kissed the words, and blotted the page with my tears. These were the lines he had written long ago from Tennyson’s “ Gardener’s Daughter,”

Were there nothing else  
For which to praise the heavens but only love,  
That only love were cause enough for praise.

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And underneath was his name signed in full—  
“Ralph Esdale.”

How I wondered where he was! If he had married the Lady Adela and was happy! I had never heard from Bentley. I had written from London two years ago to Mr. Raymont, to say I was well and safe, but gave no address. I was completely severed and cut off from the old life.

And this summer of which I am speaking passed on, and waned; and my heart was weary, waiting to hear some news of Ralph. September approached, and on the last day of August a whole host of gentlemen arrived at Loftus Hall to commence slaughter amongst the partridges on the morrow.

I seldom went into the drawing room, though I was so often asked. I preferred

the solitude and quiet of my own room. So I saw very few of the visitors that were always coming to the house. It was a very gay season this; the Hall was full of guests. Several nights I had been asked into the drawing-room, but had refused each invitation.

One morning I was sitting alone in the schoolroom; the children had gone out with the nurse, and I was glad of the quiet. I was working before a low fire—the days were getting chilly—my back to the door, so that I did not see it open. But in a moment I heard a footfall; I did not look up, I thought it was one of the children returned. I heard a voice say—

“Is Tottie here? I promised her a ride.”

I could have fallen to the ground. The

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voice that spoke I had not heard for long, but I had never ceased to hear its murmur in my ear, for it was Ralph Esdale's. I looked up, and met his glance; he started, as though he had been shot.

"Thank God—at last—at last!" he exclaimed, and would have taken me in his arms, but I sprang away. "Child, child, what does this mean?" he asked; "we meet again, thank heaven, after all these years."

"Ralph," I murmured, "you must leave me. Go away, please—you must. I cannot; this is my living, I cannot give it up."

"Never, child; you shall never leave me again. Do you think I have searched for you all this time to let you go when I have found you?"

“This is cruel,” I murmured, “unlike you, Mr. Esdale.”

“You love me, you told me so when you left me ; you must love me still, for, Heritage, you are my world.”

I looked at him, and saw that the hair had silvered and the brow furrowed since I bade him farewell in the moonlight at the little wicket gate of the Glen Cottage, two years ago. He came to me and gathered me in his arms, and folded me to his heart. I tried to escape, but he would not let me.

“What does this all mean, Heritage ? Tell me. Are you the Miss Murray I have heard so much of ?”

“I am,” I said. “Oh, Ralph,” I sobbed, “please go away ; you must never see me any more.”

“ Why not, child ? ”

“ I cannot be your wife.”

“ I have searched for you through all the country ; I had almost given it up, but to-day I find you. Oh, God ! how can I ever be thankful enough ? ”

“ And Lady Adela ? ” I was obliged to ask.

“ Was well when I saw her last.”

“ You do not love her ? ”

“ I love you, and you alone in all the world. I knew you loved me ; I knew you could not be faithless. But why have you made me suffer so, why separated yourself from me ? Heritage, I do not understand.”

I disengaged myself from his great, strong arms, went to my desk, took the paper which was the cause of separating us, and gave it

to him. He read it to the last word, then quietly put it on the fire and saw it burn to ashes.

“And that,” he said, putting his arm round me, “you thought would make me cease to love you! Oh, child, had you so little faith?” he added reproachfully.

“I am but a low-born girl,” I said, “not fit to wed with you. I cannot disgrace your family. Please, Ralph, let me be.”

“Never, darling, never. You will be my wife ere many weeks go by. I cannot live without you; you have nearly killed me by your desertion. What does it matter to me who you are, so that you are my own little Heritage.”

“Ralph, Ralph,” is all that I can murmur, and I am happy, so happy, at last.

We sit long together. I tell him of all I have been through, and he listens with a look of pain upon his face; but as he clasps me to him, the tender light from his eyes shines upon me, and he holds me as though the whole world should never take me from him again.

By-and-bye I go to the piano, and sing to him at his suggestion. And the song I choose is "Robin Adair."

We both see before us the little wood with the tall trees, the winding brook, the mass of fern and bracken, and poor Tartar sleeping on the greensward. Ralph lays one hand on each shoulder as I finish the song, and I feel the long moustache sweep against my cheek as he takes me in his arms. We stand together so happy, my head upon his

shoulder; we have no idea of the flight of time, but I hear the voices of Tottie and her sisters, and look up at him.

He does not mind who sees us. He smiles on me the sweet sad smile of long ago; I peer into the depths of the tender, wistful eyes; his face is bent lower—lower, and smothers mine in kisses.

Heritage Dane, or Heritage Murray, it matters little now, for I am able to sign this story Heritage Esdale.

THE END.









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